

## **Finding Treatment for a Child Who Has Experienced Sexual Abuse**

Finding a mental health provider who has strong skills in working with children who have experienced trauma and sexual abuse specifically is important to helping a child recover. Here are some things to consider when looking for a counselor for your child:

- Will your child be more comfortable with a male or female provider?
- Ask the provider what their definition of being Trauma Informed is and how they apply that to treatment.
- Ask if they have experience in treating sexually abused children and their families.
- Ask if they offer treatments for sexually abused children that have been studied and have been demonstrated to be effective.
- Remember that if the child and clinician do not “click”, or feel comfortable to your child, you have the right to find someone else. A comfortable relationship between your child and their therapist is key to your child’s emotional health and the effectiveness of the treatment.
- Do your homework, find out what different treatment types are, what you can expect from the sessions, what the therapist can and will share with you as the parent or care giver.
- Ask what actions you as the caregiver can take outside of the sessions to support the work your child and the clinician are doing.
- Respect your child’s privacy and let them tell you as much or as little about their treatment sessions as they are comfortable with.

If you or other family members have a trauma history the fact that your child has experienced child sexual abuse may trigger, or bring back to you memories and emotions of your own experience. By taking good care of yourself, seeking your own counselor and getting support, you will be better able to help your child recover.

What is trauma-informed treatment? A trauma-informed child- and family-service system is one in which all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with the system including children, caregivers, and service providers. Programs and agencies within such a system provide information to build trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into their organizational cultures, practices, and policies. They act in collaboration with all those who are involved with the child, using the best available science, to facilitate and support the recovery and resiliency of the child and family.

A service system with a trauma-informed perspective is one in which programs, agencies, and service providers: (1) routinely screen for trauma exposure and related symptoms; (2) use culturally appropriate evidence-based assessment and treatment for traumatic stress and associated mental health symptoms; (3) make resources available to children, families, and providers on trauma exposure, its impact, and treatment; (4) engage in efforts to strengthen the resilience and protective factors of children and families impacted by and vulnerable to trauma; (5) address parent and caregiver trauma and its impact on the family; (6) emphasize continuity of care and collaboration across child-service systems; and (7) maintain an environment of care for staff that addresses, minimizes, and treats secondary traumatic stress, and that increases staff resilience. (*National Child Traumatic Stress Network*)